



Rep. Kathy Lambert



45th District 1998 Session Report



Rep. Bill Backlund

Spring 1998



Dear Neighbors:

The 1998 legislative session came to a close on March 12. Among the accomplishments most significant to you, your family and our community were:

- ✓ A transportation package to fund crucial Eastside projects and help reduce traffic congestion, without raising the gas tax.
- ✓ More education money for improving the reading skills of students in our public schools.
- ✓ Stiffer penalties for drunk driving and tougher standards for criminal offender group homes.
- ✓ A commitment to protect and restore our salmon, and better manage our state's water resources.

We were able to meet these community needs while holding the line on spending — keeping the state budget well within Initiative 601 limits — and leaving a healthy reserve to protect taxpayers in the future.

In this newsletter, we provide further details on the Legislature's accomplishments this session, as well as information about what we'll be working on in the future.

Finally, we encourage you to attend the town hall meetings we'll be holding on May 9. We'll be discussing these and other issues in more detail, as well as answering questions and listening to input from those we represent. Please see inside for more details!

Sincerely,

Kathy Lambert

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TRANSPORTATION

What's in the Legislature's transportation plan?

First of all, there is no gas tax increase. At the beginning of the session, Gov. Gary Locke issued a plan that would have raised the gas tax 11 cents per gallon — a nearly *50 percent tax hike*.

We developed a different proposal. With state government already sitting on an \$870 million budget surplus (made up of your tax dollars), and with government at all levels taking more and more out of your pocket-book, the Legislature approved a plan that uses money taxpayers have already paid.

Our plan provides for \$2.4 billion in transportation improvements, the same amount as the governor's proposal. However, it uses money already collected through the motor vehicle excise tax (MVET) — also known as the car license tax — directly for transportation. Currently, only 16 percent of the car tax goes to transportation projects. The rest is deposited into the general fund, the source of the \$870 million surplus. Our plan would permanently transfer more MVET revenue from the general fund for new road improvements.

In addition, under our plan, all vehicle owners would get a \$30 per-car tax cut.





Local governments also would benefit from our transportation plan. Right now, many local criminal justice programs are funded with MVET revenue. Under our proposal, local governments would continue to receive state money for these anti-crime programs, but from the state general fund instead of MVET. They would also receive a funding boost of more than 10 percent.

Since education is the primary duty of the state, it's important to note that neither current nor future education funding would be affected by our plan. Not one dollar currently being spent on education would be transferred to transportation, and future projected reserves would protect the full funding of education in the future as allowed under the Initiative 601 spending limit.

To transfer surplus revenue from the general fund to transportation without adversely affecting the state spending limit, a one-time exemption is required under I-601. That is why this funding measure will be on the ballot in November.

Local projects included in the transportation plan

The Eastside can expect to see much-needed improvements to local roads and highways if the transportation package we passed becomes law. Our plan includes money for projects that will help make your commutes easier:

-  On State Route 202, add lanes and traffic signals from the Redhook Brewery to NE 85th Street, and add lanes from E. Lake Sammamish Parkway to Sahalee Way.
-  On Interstate 405, add HOV lanes from Northup Way to Bothell.
-  On State Route 520, construct a new intersection at NE 40th in Bellevue.
-  Also, make improvements to the Evergreen Point Bridge and make State Route 522, which has been called a "killer highway," safer.

CRIME

Getting tough on drunk drivers, keeping our communities safe

The Legislature passed 13 bills to protect innocent people on our roads by increasing penalties for drunk-driving offenders. These bills range from lowering the acceptable blood-alcohol content (BAC) from .10 to .08, to requiring "ignition interlocks" for DUI offenders (these devices require a person to hum into a breathalyzer before his or her car will start), to suspending a DUI offender's license for 90 days. We believe these measures will help reduce the number of injuries and deaths that often result from drunk driving.

Lawmakers also approved legislation to place restrictions on group homes that house criminal offenders, and to enact stronger laws dealing with mentally ill persons who have a history of violent behavior. The story of Stanley Stevenson, a retired firefighter who was stabbed to death by a violent, mentally ill man on his way back from a Mariners' game,



illustrated the need for this bill to be a high priority.

A bill prohibiting prison inmates convicted of sex offenses from working in jail programs that allow them access to people's private information passed the House and Senate unanimously. Rep. Backlund sponsored this bill after a woman in the 45th District was sent a Christmas card by an inmate imprisoned for rape. Unbeknownst to the woman, the inmate had taken her call when she phoned a state hotline on parks information.

Rep. Lambert also sponsored a bill approved by the Legislature that would implement statewide a program developed by the Redmond Police Department to supervise and monitor criminals released in local communities. Under the SMART program (Supervision, Management and Recidivist Tracking), local police efforts would be aided by linking them together with the state Attorney General's Office, the Department of Corrections and other local law enforcement agencies statewide.

We believe all these bills will help improve the safety of our communities.



HEALTH CARE

Quality care is our top concern

Several bills were passed promoting higher quality health care, primarily for the disabled and elderly. The Legislature approved legislation ensuring better care for seniors in long-term care settings, and giving more funds to help the developmentally disabled. Law-makers also expanded the state Basic Health Plan by 11,000 slots, and provided \$1 million for breast and cervical cancer screening for poor women.

In the future, we will continue to work for quality long-term care, and for reducing the health care bureaucracy to make it more effective and efficient for both patients and providers.

SALMON AND WATER

Protecting our resources

The Legislature approved two major pieces of legislation to start the process of salmon restoration and improve the process local governments use to plan how their water resources will be managed.

With more salmon species being put on the "endangered species" list, the Puget Sound region is going to start feeling the effect of salmon-recovery efforts. Our bill would give Washington a head start in the salmon-restoration process, and let us begin making decisions for ourselves before further federal government intervention kicks in.

The water bill marks the culmination of a five-year process to give local communities control over how our state's water resources will be planned and managed. Like the salmon bill, the goals of this legislation are to preserve natural resources and avoid massive federal intervention through the Clean Water and Endangered Species acts.



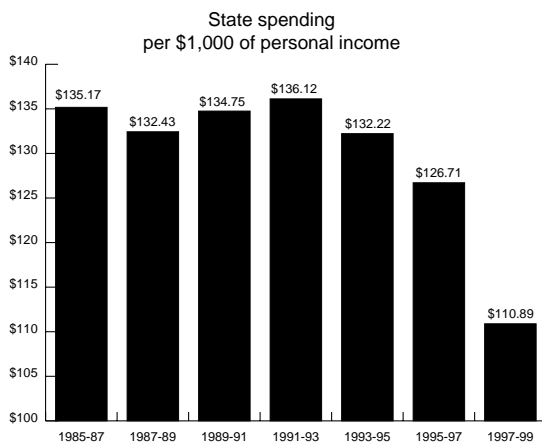
SUPPLEMENTAL BUDGET

Holding the line on spending

The adjustments to the 1997-99 operating budget approved this year included new funding for important items such as salmon restoration, reading improvement in K-12 education, the Early Childhood

Education Assistance Program (ECEAP), local government assistance for roads and criminal justice programs, crackdowns on DUI offenders, and community care for people with developmental disabilities.

However, with our economy showing some early signs of slowing, lawmakers protected taxpayers by not increasing overall spending above the \$19.085 billion two-year budget approved last year. Lower than projected caseloads in state programs like welfare provided \$106 million in savings. By redirecting these funds, we were able to meet the urgent priorities listed above, while holding the line on spending and maintaining a healthy reserve.



The 1997-99 operating budget significantly reduces government spending as a percentage of personal income.



EDUCATION

Making reading a priority

You may remember last September a statewide test of fourth-graders revealed that only 48 percent of the students could meet reading standards. As a result of those scores, the Legislature this year committed \$17 million specifically for improving student reading skills. This is a *voluntary* program that will allow teachers, if they so choose, to get additional training in phonics.

Our reading proposal is founded on the time-tested, common-sense principle that children can best learn to read when phonics is systematically incorporated into the curriculum. We would provide the opportunity for school districts to voluntar-

ily apply for money to help train teachers in phonics.

We believe that good reading skills are essential for every student. A child who can't read well will be at a disadvantage throughout his or her life. Our reading proposal takes a step toward giving all students in Washington state the best possible access to a broad variety of reading skills and techniques, as determined at the local level by school districts.

We also approved legislation allowing students to express their religious opinions and beliefs in school without fear of being punished or censured. This bill passed both Houses and was signed by the governor.

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SATURDAY, MAY 9

JOIN US FOR TOWN HALL MEETINGS

On **Saturday, May 9**, we are holding two town hall meetings, one in Kirkland (morning) and one in Woodinville (afternoon). We hope you can come and share your thoughts about the past session, and about any issues that concern you. Here are the details:



In the morning:

Kirkland
10:15 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
Kirkland Library
406 Kirkland Ave.

In the afternoon:

Woodinville
1:15 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.
Woodinville Library
17105 Avondale Rd. NE

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Department of Printing

**Washington State Legislature
1998 Session Update**

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P O Box 40600
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Printed on recycled paper